DESDE MÉXICO A AMÉRICA:

UNDERSTANDING ANTI-BLACKNESS IN MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITIES IN TEXAS

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Abstract

Title: Desde Mexico a America: Understanding Anti-Blackness in Mexican-American Communities in Texas

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When racism in America is defined as systematic oppression against people of color, there is a clear perpetrator of racism: white individuals, and a clear victim: people of color. Because of historical anti-Black institutions, this research attempts to reveal how people of color, specifically Mexican-Americans in Texas, can also be complicit and participate in anti-Black racism. By revisiting history of anti-Black racism in colonial Mexico and journeying on a timeline to Texas today, I uncover several social, institutional, and ideological ways in which Mexican-Americans do just that. The purpose of this project is to understand how and why two marginalized groups in America have found themselves in constant conflict in Texas and across the country. This is a micro-study into the patterns and trends of anti-Black racism in order to initiate questions and conversations about anti-Blackness in Latinx[1] communities in general.

In the pages that follow, we will explore whiteness, or the ways in which white structures, people, and identity enforce supremacy. We will also explore Latinidad and Mexican(American) structures, people, and identity, and the ways in which this group interacts with White supremacy and Blackness, or the ways in which Black structures, people, and identity interact with the two aforementioned areas of exploration. The goal of this thesis is to achieve a more complex and nuanced understanding of the history of anti-Blackness in order to design templates for how to potentially breakthrough these hierarchical systems of oppression.

[1] Throughout this paper, I use the term Latinx to describe the cultural group that would otherwise be known as Latino/a as a means of remaining gender neutral and including non-binary folks as well.

Introduction

The residents at Ramona Gardens apartment complex lived everyday anxiously. As mothers with migraines worried how to provide meals for their families and fathers feared that neighborhood violence would infiltrate their homes, the children of this government-funded housing project, overwhelmed with their own share of trauma, often found sleep to be their most peaceful time of day. But the children of this Boyle Heights housing project in East Los Angeles would recall that their sleep on the night of May 14th, 2014 was anything but peaceful. In the middle of the night, a real-life nightmare ensued. The sharp noise of shattering glass pierced through four homes just before foreign objects flew through the windows. Later an investigation revealed the foreign objects were actually makeshift firebombs, colloquially known as Molotov cocktails. Of the four houses that were attacked, three were homes to Black families. Unfortunately the racial facts of this crime were no mere coincidence.

Two years after the incident, seven Latino gang members were charged for the attack, revealing this crime to be a crucial chapter in a much larger narrative or race-related violence. Hazard Grande, the gang responsible for the attack, has a history in the Los Angeles area for pushing Black families out of interracial neighborhoods, specifically predominantly Latino housing projects where Black families live because of few alternative choices. Violent incidents like these have occurred at Ramona Gardens since 1992. These attacks have resulted in the immediate displacement of Black families. In a larger scope, these efforts are representative of the intentional racial conflict between Black and Latinx communities.

The displacement of Black families at Ramona Gardens revive segregation in a way that is more social than institutional. The efforts of the Civil Rights Movement promised

desegregation, but social pressures have revived segregation, however, this time not among white and Black communities, but Brown and Black communities. Anti-Black tension, and in some instances, anti-Black violence, is common in various Latinx communities in the United States from Puerto Rican communities in New York to Cuban communities in Florida. But Hazard Grande gang has its roots in Mexican heritage, with deep connections to the Mexican Mafia prison gang that directs attacks on Black communities. With a population of over 350 members, the gang has found a way to systematically discriminate against Black individuals. Ironically, a system, founded and empowered by white supremacy, which many argue has forced these Latinos into gangs and crime to begin with, has created a sub-system of hierarchical power in which one minority group, Mexican-Americans, is responsible for policing the behaviors and actions of another: African-Americans. In states across the Mexican border -- California, Arizona, Texas -- anti-Blackness is socialized in Mexican-American communities. From generation to generation, Mexican-American families pass on subtle and explicit forms of anti-Black racism - including jokes about Mexican daughters not being allowed to date black men and the use of racial slurs. But anti-Black racism has also been institutionalized at the larger societal level, manifested in housing policies, gang territories, and sometimes just traditional politics. (Rugh, 205).

Anti-Blackness, obviously, doesn't stop at the border. In fact, there is evidence that it might not have started at the border. (Andrews, 42). Scholars have increasingly shown that racism flows in and out of the neighboring countries (Andrews 45), inciting violence and oppression towards Black bodies on either side: for example, Mexico's impact on bordering US Towns such as Brownsville, Laredo, and Eagle Pass. In Mexico, however, the anti-blackness is more subtle, (keep in mind, subtle does not mean less dangerous) and severely understudied. One

such research study showed that anti-blackness starts early, and can be found in seemingly innocent assessments of young children. Conapred, a Mexican organization aimed at highlighting and preventing discrimination, attempted to shed light on anti-blackness in Mexico by studying one of the country's most impressionable and honest demographics: children. In this study, director of Conapred, Ricardo Bucio, provided a racially and socioeconomically diverse sample of children with two toy dolls: one white and one black. The children were then asked a series of questions such as: Which is the ugly one and which is the pretty one? Which is the good one and which is the bad one? The results of the mostly qualitative study were surprising to the uninformed eye, but maybe not so much to those who have been ingrained with these anti-Black sentiments for generations now. Specifically, one brown-skin girl responded that she liked the white doll better because she found his eyes to be "beautiful, and his race too." Another brown-skinned boy identified the white doll as "the good one," and despite any sufficient justification, defended his claim by stating he could trust the white doll more. This study highlights the ways in which anti-Blackness is socialized. Even in a country where the majority of residents are Brown or non-white, there is a clear unspoken hierarchy: white is better, Black is worse. Some argue Blackness isn't even perceived as worse than whiteness, it's ignored altogether (Lewis, 890). Mexico's anti-Blackness has historical roots as far back as the origins of the country itself, but most of its racism is manifested in the erasure of Black demographics altogether[2] (Planas).

Mexico's history with anti-Blackness is crucial to examine because it provides a historical context for racial conflict between Mexican-Americans and Black Americans in the United States today. After all, a large portion of Mexican-Americans in the US have have primarily molded their identity and role in American society within the last century. Mexican-

[2] Through the development of this paper, I'll reveal the ways in which these demographics are erased in modern times.

American communities live a unique experience in the United States: to the system that is White America, Mexican-Americans are not quite fully American, no matter their citizenship status or how many generations they might have lived here. Simultaneously, Mexican-Americans are often dismissed by their counterparts in Mexico as not "Mexican" enough. In this way, Mexican-Americans exist between two worlds. In one world, they are shaped by their cultural traditions from Mexico -- the Spanish language dominating many American households, Mexican-inspired music infused into the mainstream of the industry, and food becoming a staple of diverse American culture. In the other world, one where assimilation isn't so glamorized, Mexican-Americans suffer the consequences of the imperialistic power of the United States. Mexican-Americans' influence continues to grow in the political sphere, as this demographic group has a reputation of being the "sleeping giant," or one of the most potentially influential voting demographics in American politics. As values get passed on from Mexicans who immigrated into America or those whose ancestors fell victim to the expansion efforts of the United States, it becomes unclear where, when, how, or why anti-Black bias originate and then persist.

As Mexican culture influences Mexican-American communities in America, it's also crucial to distinguish the drastic differences between the two cultures. Mexican-Americans, in comparison to native Mexicans, undergo a much different educational system, in which Mexican-Americans are more likely to have access to education suitable for a competitive job market (Behnken, 98). Additionally, the economies of the two countries differ drastically, from the difference of economic industries to access to welfare programs, as well as the difference in class disparities and potential for social mobility (Massey and Espinosa, 939). Politically, Mexicans in their native country have more representation and control over their government

than Mexican-Americans in the US, given that Mexico's government is run predominantly by Mexicans and the US' government is run predominantly by white people. Yet the Mexican government is scandalized with corruption and infiltration of drug cartels (Mercille, 1637). Socially, the United States has a much more diverse demographic make-up with much larger proportions of Black, Asian, and of course, white populations. In Mexico, most of the diversity comes from different Latinx nationalities as most non-Mexicans migrate from neighboring countries where most cultural factors are similar enough as to not cause any major differences. Though Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have many differences, they share in common a cultural bias against Black people and Blackness. This thesis seeks to explore: where exactly does the anti-black sentiment come in? And what elements of anti-blackness in Mexico exist in Mexican-American communities in the US and vice-versa?

Though the manifestations of anti-black racism differ in Mexico and the U.S. - be they institutional, physical, financial, social, or attitudinal - I argue that a disdain for Blackness - is at the core of both groups. The state of Texas serves as an ideal case studying considering its close geographic proximity to Mexico and its unique history as a Mexican territory, a Republic, and currently, a border state in the United States. This type of research is especially necessary at a time when racial tension in the United States is at an all time-high and minority groups struggle for safety. Similarly, while Mexico prides itself on ardent nationalism, and political groups appear eager to hold on to mestizo pride in a seemingly post-racial society, they do so while erasing Black marginalized Mexicans. Understanding the origins, cultivation, and perpetuation of anti-black racism among the two could be crucial in understanding race relations on a global scale. Thus, it becomes imperative that we ask the research question: How does anti-Blackness in Mexico shape/influence Anti-blackness in Mexican-American communities in Texas? In order to

answer this question, I have analyzed scholarship from a variety of disciplines, but I have also unearthed gaps in the literature that warrants further research. All of the studies I will present address dimensions of anti-blackness, but it is the compilation that allows me to gain purchase on my research question. Some scholarship addresses anti-blackness, but homogenizes the entire Latinx community as one entity, ignoring the nuances of race relations such as the political histories between certain countries and their specific narratives of Blackness. Surprisingly, few research projects explored anti-blackness as it is experienced in Mexico until fairly recently, and among those that do, most of the literature was historical as opposed to sociological or anthropological. Although there is a significant amount of literature analyzing the racial tension of Black and Latinx communities in the United States,, most authors insist on homogenizing Latinx communities as one same group, creating an inaccurate description of why this tension might come from specific Latinx nationalities. Similarly, most of these studies explore why anti-blackness is rampant among US Latinos as a result of American power, and more specifically, white power, but this generalized fails to acknowledge the histories of anti-Blackness in Mexican history and heritage. Overall, there is a disconnect between the understandings of Black and Mexican-American tension in the United States and the Black and Mexican tension in Mexico.

My research aims to close this gap by illuminating both the correlation between the two, but also the differences between anti-Black sentiment in Mexico, and among Mexican-Americans in the U.S. Unpacking these similarities and differences will help clarify how anti-blackness forms and works. To do so, I will first explore the history of anti-blackness in Mexico, uncovering the growth and trends of this racism from the beginning of the African slave-trade to modern-day Mexico. Then I will analyze the formation of Black and Mexican-American relations in Texas, analyzing the patterns of both coalition and tension from the Civil Rights era

to the present day. Throughout the timeline of events, I will offer analysis and attempt to explain larger implications about race, identity, conflict, power, and oppression by examining the unique social contexts of the research presented.

All of my analysis will come from primary sources, or first-hand studies of these groups, or from secondary, scholarly analysis of studies of these groups, including interviews with members of both groups. The intent behind this method of analysis was to preserve the objectivity of the subject matter in order to dissect recurring patterns and trends along different times and locations.

Though my research fills a necessary gap in the scholarly canon, due to the scope of this project, I will not be able to engage in an intersectional analysis of how race and other social markers of power come together to shape the lived experiences of different individuals in these communities. For example, I am fully aware that anti-black sentiment affects subgroups in different and complicated ways. Women in both Mexican and Mexican-American cultures may experience race relations and power dynamics in a more specific way because of machismo, and black women in both groups have the added element of misogynoir that creates different experiences of racism as well. Similarly, members of the LGBTQ community may also experience race relations and power dynamics differently because of institutionalized and socialized homophobia in both Mexico and the United States, and Black LGBTQ members in either group have a more intersectional experience. To uncover the specifics of each and every intersectional identity is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I will address these nuances and potential gaps in my analysis throughout this work. To facilitate my analysis, I often consider Mexican-Americans as a homogenous group, but other scholars could expand on this work and examine other axis of difference. Finally, most of my research on Mexican-Americans centers on

Mexican-Americans in areas where Mexican-American populations are traditionally abundant, specifically with a focus on the state of Texas. I am fully aware that Mexican-Americans live in states across the country, but for the purposes of this research, I've decided it's much more effective to understand Mexican-Americans' experiences in densely populated areas rather than in more isolated communities. With this acknowledgement of omission, I am fully aware of the limitations and capacities of my research.

What is anti-Blackness?

Before journeying along the timeline of anti-Blackness in Mexican and Mexican-American groups, it's crucial to not only understand what exactly anti-Blackness is, but what Blackness is as well. In the academic genre, Black existentialism, a multitude of scholars examine what it means to be Black, and therefore, what it means to be against Blackness as well. W. E. Dubois' introduced the concept of "double consciousness," or the ways in which Black Americans were both Black and American, but in a way in which the two identities contradict one another. Basically Dubois argued that in the US, to be Black is to be not American and to be American is to be not Black. He emphasized the need for Black people to develop two outlooks on life: the one imposed on them by colonialism, imperialism, and slavery, in which they are seen as inferior to white supremacy, and the other, an outlook that sheds light on victim blaming, or recognizing the ways in which institutional racism has oppressed Black people and shaped Black identity. One of his most important questions posed: was there meaning behind the suffering of Black people? This question is important because it brings into question the ways in which white supremacy formed and evolved, and interacts with Blackness. One scholar inspired by Du Bois attempted to answer this question, as well as present several others. He first asks:

what is a human? And then: how can one become free? He explains that people who are enslaved, colonized, or racially oppressed are forced to question their humanity, potentially even doubting their humanity, and in constant search of what it means to be human. For Black Americans and Black Mexicans suffering from the consequences of enslavement, colonization, and racial oppression, these questions and doubts continue to linger in the modern day.

But these new questions still leave age-old questions unanswered: was there meaning behind the origin of Black oppression? From a historical perspective, we could answer yes. Black disdain meant the commodification of human beings for profit, the maintenance of power, money, glory, and privilege. But from an existential point of view, the answers become less concrete. Had white people, and therefore white systems, institutions, and bodies of government, never existed, would anti-Blackness still exist? When examining the ways in which anti-Blackness does exist in Mexican and Mexican-American communities, would this type of anti-Black racism still be alive and rampant? Or is there something in our human nature that longs for supremacy and superiority over others? Would Blackness still be the so-called inferior race without white supremacy? Or would another non-Black group adopt the same ideologies and practices? Gordon highlights these conversations further, questioning the ways in which religion forces those who are religious to see the world as their own, their subjectivity as objectivity, and allows us to evade freedom and responsibility. When considering how Mexican and Mexican-American culture and demographics are largely shaped by religious views and practices, this might be one way to understand the reasons behind anti-Blackness. While my research does not center around religiosity, this nature of constantly questioning why from a moralistic and existential viewpoint could serve as an effective way to approach the following analysis.

Understanding Anti-Blackness in Mexico

History: Colonization Era

In his extensive research on Afro-Latin America, George Andrews reveals African roots in what is now known as Mexico are dated as far back as centuries before Mexico was even recognized as a country. In fact, the African Diaspora, or the spreading of Blackness across the world, occurs as far back as the colonization of indigenous folks of the Aztec Empire. (In order to understand how Blackness spread to and through Mexico, it's imperative to understand the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire.

Though Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba first arrived in the Mexican Peninsula, Yucatan, in 1517, Spanish colonizers really took control of the land and its people in 1519 when Hernan Cortes, along with 500 men, attempted to conquer the Aztec empire. Andrews argues these maneuvers allowed the Spanish to take the reigns of the Aztec empire. By introducing diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza -- diseases that the Aztecs had no immunity to and no available treatments -- and allying with Aztec opponents like the Totonac and the Tlaxcalteca people[3], Cortés and his men weakened the Aztecs and made them more vulnerable for attack. Five months after Cortes' initial attack, he landed in San Juan de Ulloa and began his conquest: seizing land by overthrowing leaders with the use of armies and slaughtering Aztec people. Two years later, the Spanish conquered the city of Tenochtitlan, displacing and murdering approximately 500,000 native residents. In the aftermath of this brutal takeover, the colony of New Spain was born. For the next few years, disputes between Spanish colonizers and Native residents led to a drastic decline of Native folk. Spanish conquerors had many resources: weapons, food, and men, so whenever indigenous folk attempted to fight back, they were easily

[3] Indigenous groups in pre-colonial Mexico

defeated. With the Spanish colonization of the Aztec empire came the need for labor, and with native Aztecs almost completely wiped out, Africans became an important commodity in Spanish colonies (Andrews, 42).

While slavery is often reimagined as a historical American narrative, only four percent of the ten million slaves who were forced into the Western World ended up in the United States. (Proctor, 36). In fact, Latin America received twenty-five times more slaves than the United States from 1540-1860. During this time, slave ships landed in ports all the way from Acapulco in Guerrero to Oaxaca -- a 300 mile long coastline on the east to southeast side of the border. Since that time, generations of Central and South Americans have been raised with African heritage. Many of whom were left in Mexico during the slave trade (Palmer).

This long standing forced African Diaspora inevitably shapes Black identity in Mexico, but it plays out very differently than in other Central and South American countries. For example, African slaves were left in Haiti or Jamaica which were major hubs for trade slave, but in Mexico, which was never truly a central hub for slave trade, but rather a travel port for slaves to be taken from one place to another, slaves had different experiences. In fact, many slaves who tried to escape other countries often ended up in Mexico in the middle of their transit, while others fled to Mexico because it was not as dangerous as other Latin American countries. While this was the case, there were still many slaves living in Mexico. From the late 1500's to the early 1800's, the Mexican-owned slaves came from several places: many were brought from the Caribbean, others were captured slaves who had attempted to escape to countries as far as Peru. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran, a Black Mexican anthropologist, calculates that by 1810, ten percent of the Mexican population was freed slaves. This data provides us with insight into the origins of how Black people arrived to Mexico, and hints to how beliefs about Blackness became

embedded within the cultural, social, and genealogical development of the country. But the existence of Black people fails to explain the disdain of Blackness and for Black people, specifically how that anti-Blackness found its way into the attitudes, migration patterns, and policies of the country. While the narrative of the Transatlantic slave trade often portrays Mexico as a sanctuary, a bystander country in the midst of human trafficking, Mexico was just as implicated in slave ownership and trade as some of the most imperialistic countries of the time (Kahn). During the colonial period (sixteenth to nineteenth century) in "New Spain," what is now known as Mexico, this territory harbored more slaves than any other colony of the time. As European diseases and mass murders at the hands of the Spanish wiped out the indigenous populations, Africans were used as replacements for the harsh labor. Colin Palmer of the Smithsonian Education organization writes,

"African slaves labored in the silver mines of Zacatecas, Taxco, Guanajuato, and Pachuca in the northern and central regions; on the sugar plantations of the Valle de Orizaba and Morelos in the south; in the textile factories ("obrajes") of Puebla and Oaxaca on the west coast and in Mexico City; and in households everywhere. Others worked in skilled trade or on cattle ranches. Although black slaves were never more than two percent of the total population, their contributions to colonial Mexico were enormous, especially during acute labor shortages."

Because African slaves were responsible for labor that not only contributed to the economy, but quite literally built the infrastructure of Mexico, their very existence is responsible for some of the foundations and development of Mexico as a country. Especially at times when populations shifted and indigenous people were too scarce in numbers to produce adequate work,

African slaves helped build the country.

As mentioned, labor was largely affected by demographic shifts and the African presence in Mexico shifted as time passed. Slave ownership, forced relationships, proximity to other racial groups, and demographic shifts of men and women in Spanish, Indigenous, and African communities all affected procreation rates of Mexico (Lewis, 902). Because there were far more African men than women in Mexico, marriages and amorous relationships spread outside of their culture and ethnic origins, with slaves reproducing with indigenous folk, and less frequently, Spaniards. This interracial mixing created the emergence of a new demographic often called "mulattos," "pardos," or "zambos," all implying some sort of mixture of ethnic or racial identity (Lewis, 901). In his book, Comparing Studies of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Herbert Klein notes that even with the occurrence of interracial relations, the slave experience in Mexico was no less harsh or no more idyllic from the slave narratives of other colonies. Slaves were still oppressed, treated as inferior, and punished with abuse, confinement, or other forms of torture. Death rates among slaves were disproportionately high especially in silver mines and plantations. And just like in other colonies, Black slaves in Mexico resisted their circumstances in a variety of ways. Klein explains as Black slaves became informed of palenques, or settlement towns, in the mountains of Veracruz, many fled the harsh conditions of enslavement. As more fugitives escaped to these freedom towns, slave owners grew frustrated with the instability of their work, and as a result, reluctantly recognized the freedom of the Black slaves as a means of being able to profit off of their labor without creating more hassle for themselves. Klein highlights, In 1829, the institution of slavery was formally abolished by the new independent nation of Mexico. Though the emancipation of slaves at the hands of Mexican government suggests the country was progressive, especially considering Mexico abolished slavery decades before the United

States, it is crucial to remember that many generations of Blacks were born into slavery in Mexico, and the cultural views towards Africans persisted generations even after abolishment. As the Black diaspora spread throughout the country, their cultural influences in the form of music, dance, food, and spiritual traditions embedded themselves into Mexican culture. While these cultural staples embedded themselves into Mexican culture, Africans, the originators of these cultural relics, were not given credit (Klein, 6). Thus, a complicated identity, one of African and Mexican and Indigenous and Spanish identity is born.

Historical Spotlight: Gaspar Yanga

When we discuss life in the New World post-colonization, we often center our conversations around figures like Christopher Columbus, "the man who discovered America," as written by some imperialistically influenced American textbooks, and a mass murderer to many who recognize him for his genocidal ways. Other historical figures, such as Gaspar Yanga, are often erased from our common teachings of history. As the founder of the settlement, Yanga, located between the ports of Veracruz and Cordoba in what is now Veracruz, Mexico, Gaspar Yanga and his history are a crucial point in the timeline of Mexican history. Though records of him and his contributions are sorely lacking, regional lore, or the passing down of information via oral communication, reveals that Yanga was a prince stolen from a royal family of Gabon, Africa. There are no official records of his specific location of capture, but his name has origins in West and Central Africa. For almost 40 years, between 1570 and 1609, Yanga led followers, specifically African slaves, to the highest mountain in Mexico to settle. That year, Spanish colonizers attempted to conquer the palenques but were met with resistance, resulting in abundant losses on both sides. In 1631, Spanish viceroy, Rodrigo Pacheco began negotiations

with the resistance, and Spain agreed to recognize the African community as an autonomous region known then as San Lorenzo de los Negros, and in 1932, by Mexican order, as Yanga.

As imperative as it is to understand Black racism throughout the history of Mexican(American) racism, it's also important to understand that efforts at Black liberation has just as long of a history. It highlights how Black populations have always been aware of the ways in which they have been dehumanized, and despite revolutionary efforts at every point in history, the powers of the oppressor have often been too strong to break (Floja, 3).

Scholars reveal unique pressures on African-Mexican slaves during the Colonial era, as well as a window into race relations at the time. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were complicated times for the territory formerly known as "New Spain" because of the shift in power and demographics. In his 2003 journal, Afro-Mexican Slave Labor in the Obrajes de Paños of New Spain, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Frank T. Proctor tells the story of Juan Joseph De Porras, a man who represented an emerging demographic in New Spain: Afro-Mexicans. Also known as mulattos, these individuals were the offspring of Black and Indigenous people, and as the Spanish continued to exploit the two groups for hard labor, the interactions of two led to the eventual interracial procreation and marriages. Proctor's research investigates the demographic composition of the wooden textile mills near Mexico City. At the time, the increasing price of African slaves drastically reduced the demand for slave labor, and the positions were instead filled by indigenous folks and convicts. The demographic shifts, the increase in indigenous and mixed people, highly influenced labor in Mexico. From 1580 to 1640, the need for slave labor increased the African population in Mexico, but the re-emergence of Indigenous and mixed folk after 1640, led to a decline in African populations across New Spain.

But Black people in Africa didn't disappear, rather those who remained experienced a shift in their role. R. Douglas Cope explains that because colonizers no longer depended on slave labor for economic prosperity, the role of a slave transformed from one of necessity to a luxury, a status symbol, if you will. Slaves became coachmen, maids, and personal servants, rather than routinely participating in rough physical labor (Douglas Cope, 95). Make no mistake; this new-wave of slave labor was also systematically and socially oppressive. The urbanization of New Spain moved Black people in Mexico to new spaces. Slave-like labor, however, still continued with Afro-Mexicans. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the presence of Black people still very much lived in colonial Mexico, but the faces of Blackness were more diverse. The roles in which they occupied were more diverse. Blackness was still synonymous with labor and subordination as opposed to any form of humanization. So while slaves were no longer overworked in the fields, they were serving non-Black people indoors. No longer were slaves abused by slave masters; they were instead "reprimanded by their employers" (Proctor, 50).

Implications

The origins and history of Blackness in pre-colonial America gives rise to several implications that shaped the historical and contemporary race relations of Mexico. First, the era of colonization gave meaning to a Black body in Mexico. Beltran argued Blackness was directly linked to labor.

"The Black slave, during the colony, besides being destined to work in the sugar mills and haciendas of the hot lands, was also required to work… in all those places inland, in the highlands and the sierras, where there were mining operations, as well as in the obrajes [textile

workshops] of the big cities. Black influence, in the biological as well as the cultural sense, was not limited to the narrow coastal areas: it was felt over the vital centers of a vast territory" (Beltran, 9).

The introduction of Blackness in Mexico was never consensual. Black slaves never asked to settle in Mexico, in fact, they were brutally captured from their homes and forced to complete hard labor on "New Spanish" land. From its conception, the role of the Black body, in this case, the African slave, was to be a replacement for indigenous labor, for an equitable resource that was missing. Black people were chosen and forced to fulfill the roles that had previously been occupied by Brown bodies, the indigenous folks of the region. As we explore the role of Black people in predominantly brown communities in contemporary Mexico, and especially in contemporary Mexican-American communities, it's crucial to keep that in mind. The ways in which Black and Brown labor are seen as disposable and interchangeable in modern-day America highlight ways in which this practice continues (i.e. prison labor, agricultural work, industries with physical labor). If Black and Brown bodies were initially seen as nothing more than commodities for work, then what does that say about the ways in which those identities were forced to evolve into who we are today in America, Mexico, and across the world?

In his article, Africa's Legacy, Connor Palmer highlights Mexican's severe lack of understanding with its country's Black history. We know that Africans were initially concentrated in coastal areas until they were then later moved inland across the territory. We don't, however, have much historical account whether or not the two groups ever attempted to join in solidarity to resist and fight back against the Spanish. If there ever were substantial efforts at solidarity, it's interesting to wonder why this type of historical account is so rare. If there were

never productive efforts of solidarity, it's just as curious to question what influences might have kept the two groups from doing so -- perhaps limited access to resources and weaponry, language barriers, cultural differences, geographical distance, or physical barriers. Either way, the lack of recorded solidarity introduces a thoughtful understanding of what it means for two different groups to be complicit in the other's oppression -- be it fear, lack of knowledge, or perpetuation of the oppressor's hegemonic ideals.

From a sociological and anthropological perspective, there's an uncertainty surrounding what the indigenous folks thought about the African population and vise versa. I wonder how much one group knew about the other's experiences and how often they interacted. How much of much of a role did the Spanish colonizers have in keeping them distant, in opposition, or unaware of the other? Aside from the history of the cultivation of Blackness, that is the very presence of Black existence, in Mexico, the retelling of history in Mexico says a lot about the way Blackness exists in Mexico. Yet many of these questions are merely speculative. The absence of Black History in Mexico, or the colonial New Spain, (Palmer) leaves us with several considerations primarily stemming from the question: who is responsible for erasing this history?

But the diaspora and the cultural impact of Blackness in Mexico spread, from African slaves who worked under the Spanish throne to American slaves who sought Mexico as a place of refuge from US Slavery. In addition, The Mexican government allowed Black folk from the Caribbean to immigrate into the country to work on the construction of the Tehuantepec isthmus and the transoceanic railroad in the late 1800's. At the same time, thousands of Black Cubans fled to Mexico after the war of independence. An array of nationalities, all mixed with Black descent, moved throughout Mexico and established their homes.

While Mexico abolished slavery and welcomed Black populations from elsewhere in

Central America, it was always a conditional exchange requiring something in return -- a quid pro quo. At the beginning of the international slave trade, African slaves were captured and forced into Mexico to replace the labor shortages left behind by the massacres of the indigenous. After slavery was abolished, the Mexican government allowed American slaves to settle in Mexico, even offering them land on the northern territory, so that they could help fight off Americans who tried to commit Indian raids and occupy territory. The welcoming of Black Caribbeans was motivated solely by their labor and contributions to a growing industrial economy (Proctor, 55). Through centuries of development, conquest, resistance, and revolution, the role of the Black body never changed; it was always labor. Blackness was allowed in Mexico insofar as it had something to offer the Mexican public. Though there were efforts to promote equality and social justice, they had few lasting impacts, especially in comparison to the large, powerful systems that only used Black bodies as a commodity. Those minimal impacts were often overshadowed by large performative acts of empty advocacy. For example, though slavery was abolished in the 1800's, the distinction between Black folk and what was categorized as true Mexicans persisted (Proctor, 58).

The Twentieth Century and the Creation of the Mestizaje Identity

In the early twentieth century, after the revolution, Mexican politicians attempted to create a unified national identity. Before that time (and arguably, after as well) those strongly affiliated with Spanish descent held more power, higher social status, and greater economic prosperity, while those closely linked to indigenous roots remained powerless, at the bottom of the social chain, and were more likely to endure poverty. The mestizo identity sought to eliminate a divide between the two identities, and instead embrace the mixture of the two threads

of Mexico's past as something to be proud of. The Native Indian went from being a symbol of racial and ethnic inferiority to one of value standing alongside its Spanish counterpart to create the new symbol for a more "progressive" Mexico, the combination of two origins to create one unified cultural identity. But in an attempt to be racially equal, the national conversation surrounding identity completely erased Blackness as a crucial component of Mexican identity. Some academics have argued that the reason for this Black erasure was the seemingly diluted presence of Blackness in Mexico (Proctor, 37). As years passed, the biological and social remnants of Blackness lessened and lessened through the mixture of Black, indigenous, and Spanish blood. Though the same can be argued for indigenous identity, it might be that indigenous identity remained because they had a larger presence and were ultimately the original inhabitants of the land. It can also be argued that this preference for the indigenous preservation over Black preservation was a convenient coincidence as the preference for Spanish appearances (white skin, lighter hair and eyes) was always juxtaposed with a disdain for Black phenotypes. Conversations of mestizaje and the national acceptance of a mestizo identity further proves this point.

Mexican officials were willing to mixed status because of its proximity to whiteness over a Black identity. As the national discourse continued, other words like "moreno" were adopted into mainstream discussions of race and identity. "Moreno" originally used to describe Afro-mestizos or those directly of African descent has evolved to simply mean "dark skin" in its colloquial modern day use. But the word, and the use of *any* word needed to separate "true" mestizos from Black mestizos highlights the inherent inequality among races in Mexico. In her journal article, Maria De La Torre offers a vital explanation:

"By referring to themselves as morenos, rather than as Blacks, people of African descent in Costa Chica adopted a racial denomination that has become central to the hegemonic construction of Mexicanness and national belonging. This phenomenon is hardly surprising, for identities are imposed from the outside, prominently by the state, but they are also assumed and reconstructed as part of a collective action and claim making. Since there were no political and social incentives to adopting a Black identity, people of African descent thus chose to refer to themselves first and foremost as morenos, as Mexicans (Ibid.). Notably, most Mexicans use the term moreno rather than the term Black when referring to Afro-Mexican compatriots, and they may simply add the adjective dark and say dark morenos."

In all of these words, these identifiers, there is active effort to avoid the term Blackness. The erasure of these words and its rhetorical impact has long-lasting impacts on society and culture. If you don't have the words to identify Blackness, you can't identify with it. The erasure of vocabulary and rhetoric allowed Mexicans to accomplish the avoidance of Blackness.

Transporting Mexican Identity Across the Border

The emergence of a new national Mexican identity in the early twentieth century played a huge role in the development of Mexican-American identity for the generations to come. After all, at the time of this newfound identity formation, more and more Mexicans were immigrating to the United States, with a large majority of those immigrants going to Texas. The state of Texas had formerly been Mexican territory, and though it was annexed by the United States in 1845, the flow of immigrants remained scarce from the mid nineteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. It wasn't until the 1890's that poverty rates and political chaos pushed

Mexicans into Texas at faster and larger rates (Mckay, 64). In the 1890's, a growing industrial revolution in the US lured Mexican immigrants into Texas; mining and agricultural were particularly favorable because they generated more profit. Twenty years later from the 1910's to the 1920's, the Mexican Revolution created violence, economic distress, and political chaos throughout the country, so even more Mexicans migrated to the United States as a result. A combination of refugees and political exiles made up the new demographics of Texans, but common citizens took this opportunity to seek a more stable and prosperous life as well. As far as documented migrants go, rates increased from about twenty thousand a year in the 1910's to between fifty and a hundred thousand a year in the 1920's (Behnken, 50).

There was one exception to this migration. During the Great Depression in the US in the 1930's there was a significant caused a decline in immigration trends, and many Mexicans returned to their original country. Even so, the numbers were by no means comparable to the large number of Mexicans who had entered the United States for the two decades prior. Keep in mind, these immigrants weren't necessarily welcomed with open arms, but rather, were often seen as a commodity to a growing American economy (De La Torre, 45). As eugenics became more popularized and policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act were institutionalized to keep out "foreigners," Mexicans were often exempt from mass removals because the US understood that their labor was a necessity to maintain the ability of the US economy (Mckay, 72). Of course, there were exceptions and mass deportations occurred when Mexican labor was no longer needed, but in the White American hegemonic discussions of what races are superior over others, Mexicans were typically seen as more valuable than Asians because they could allegedly perform hard labor that no other race could, and in harsh conditions (Behnken, 86). As the Mexican-American demographic grew in the United States, there were always political, social,

and economic reinforcements that Mexicans in America, even those born on the American side of the border, were in fact a second class of citizens. This was no more evident than in a post Great Depression America. Though a large population of Mexicans resided in Texas, a third of that original population was forcefully removed once their labor was no longer necessary (Reynolds, 6). This Mexican Repatriation was responsible for almost 83,000 involuntary deportations and additional tens of thousands who voluntarily deported themselves out of fear of deportation in conjunction with systematic job deprivation and economic disparity.

But repatriation did not keep Mexicans out of the U.S. for long. In his book, Texas Mexican Repatriation During the Great Depression, Reynolds Mckay notes that In the early 1940's, Mexicans returned to the United States to help fight in World War II. Almost five percent of the US army at the time was made up of Mexican immigrants, and because they were offered temporary citizenship, many Mexicans stayed after serving in the war, settling in regions where agriculture and labor was abundant, such as Texas. But because complications with the G.I. Bill deprived Mexicans of certain rights and benefits, migration within the United States became a trend. So not only were Mexicans moving into the United States, they were then moving around the United States. Mckay explains that simultaneously, a shortage of labor due to the war resulted in an emergency labor program in which the US offered Mexicans temporary visas to work in America in exchange for temporary residency. As a result of all of these factors, the Mexican-American demographic grew, and from the 1910's to the 1940's.

However, even with increased visibility, discrimination increased. Immigrant veterans were denied funerals on American land because of their Mexican heritage, and it wasn't until 1948 that Texas desegregated schools between whites and Mexican-Americans. At this time, political organizers - especially veterans who had been unjustly deprived of benefits - began to

collectivize in an attempt to gain recognition and justice from the state. Mckay summarizes all in all, the introduction of Mexican identity, and subsequently the Mexican-American hybrid, into mainstream American society, especially in Texas, was very complex, but at it's core, we return to trends we've historically seen before: Mexicans were seen as labor. Disposable. Recyclable. Neglectable. They were continuously dehumanized -- denied housing rights, forbidden from restaurants, and separated from white schools -- and only recognized by the state when they were of monetary value or seen as a threat to economic prosperity. Their role was very well defined and they were sentenced to be members of the working class for as long as they were in America.

While Mexicans were forced into the lower class, Black Americans had long been accustomed to it. After slavery was abolished, Black people remained impoverished, working for rich white folk, suffering from the societal consequences of a system that enslaved them for centuries. Black Americans had a much more difficult time gaining rights and personhood in the US than Mexican. In Texas, black populations were far from uncommon. As more Mexican-Americans entered not only the state, but the economic lower class, Black and Mexican-American demographics began to interact.

The Civil Rights Era

The emergence and proliferation of the Civil Rights Movement complicated the relationship between Black and Mexican-American group even more. In his book, The Struggle in Black and Brown, Brian Behnken notes how scholars in academia will often oversimplify relationships between Black and Latinx communities, painting them as either completely cooperative or completely antagonistic when in reality the relationship was both, neither, and so

much more. The dynamic between these two communities in Texas remained complex because of factors such as population, autonomy, labor struggles, poverty, and leadership. The journey is not one with a definite start and finish, rather one rooted in historical overlaps and cross-regional experiences.

In 1948, Mexican-American activist George Sanchez penned a letter to Thurgood Marshall, an established Black attorney, sending support and affirmation for his efforts in desegregating public schools. As a proponent of desegregation, Sanchez had been involved in major court cases that helped abolish segregation of Mexican-American and white students in several school districts across Texas. The interaction between these two leaders was symbolic being that it allowed both parties to explicitly recognize the similarities in their struggle, yet it did little to promote action for a coalition between these two groups primarily because of identity politics. Prior to the social revolution of the 1960's, Mexican-Americans pushed a white identity, attempting to convince White America that they, too, were white. In doing so, they isolated themselves from the rest of the non-white communities, placing themselves on a pedestal of racial superiority, positioning themselves on a self-created hierarchy that placed them under pure Anglos, but above other non-white races (Behnken, 49).

In his letter, however, Sanchez attempted to break the division between Black and Brown communities by highlighting their similarities. One difference that he notes is that while discrimination against Black individuals was legalized, there were no official laws permitting the discrimination against Mexican-Americans. So while both were systematic, Black discrimination was institutionalized while Mexican-American discrimination was de facto, implemented by Whites who owned and cultivated Whites only spaces in Texas communities where large portions of the population consisted of Mexican-Americans.

This difference complicated the legal struggles for Mexican-Americans seeking equity, especially in education, because the two groups had similar histories, but significantly different legal rights and experiences. For example, Black groups were able to use Jim Crow laws and preceding cases like Plessy v. Ferguson to fight against discrimination laws imposed against them. Mexican-Americans could not use these cases because the discrimination against them was never legalized in policies and practices the way it was against Black individuals. As a result, Mexican-Americans had to rely on historic Spanish treaties to prove that they were white and deserved to share the same benefits and privileges of their Anglo counterparts. It was the perfect opportunity to liberate themselves as victims of oppression by becoming the oppressors themselves (Araiza, 78).

Thus the Mexican-American burden was two-fold: prove that Mexican-American faced discrimination despite the absence of discriminatory laws, and prove their whiteness. In doing so, Mexican-Americans found themselves managing new cultural hurdles. Often, they found themselves in the presence of anti-Mexican, white jurors, judges, and superintendents who were prepared to argue against the assimilation and acceptance of Mexican-Americans. Not only were Mexican-Americans forced to endure legal battles, but even with several victories, societal perceptions of the Mexican-American demographic left them with limited space and basically no power in society (Ramos, 19). The approach of claiming white identity, an approach that seemed necessary, while arguing non-white discrimination became one of their greatest struggles.

Rather than joining together to tackle white supremacy, leaders from both Black and Mexican-American often criticized efforts at joint work and argued the movements should remain independent of each other. When Sanchez approached Roger Baldwin, one of the main directors of the ACLU at the time, with the desire and proposal to merge efforts from African-

American and Mexican-American groups to end discrimination, Baldwin argued against it. His reasoning was multi-layered, arguing that the historical differences between the groups would not allow for successful legal arguments, but also but one of his primary reasons, if not the primary one, was that he felt Black Americans had nothing to gain out of the coalition. He felt that Mexican-Americans had to develop their own tactics and strategies towards their own problems (Ramos, 23).

On surface level, some members on both sides felt this was divisive. But the truth of the matter is the Black Civil Rights movement had already been in progress for over 30 years at the time. Solidarity would have been convenient for Mexican-Americans to join on, yes, but in a way it subtly reinforces the roles that both Mexican-Americans and Black people fulfilled in the development of American society. This was a way for Mexican-Americans to ride the coattails of Black success, expecting Black people to have done all the hard labor and foundational work, while Mexican-Americans contributed only in times when it mattered to them. Remember that people of Mexican descent also owned slaves at a point in time, too, and whether or not the civil rights leaders of the time realized it, the desire of Mexican-Americans to join forces was reminiscent of a time when anti-black Mexicans explicitly used Black bodies for work while they reaped the benefits. Perhaps the opponents from the ACLU didn't consider this explicitly, but these tensions and power struggles have been woven into our histories. This absolutely muddles conversations of race relations because it leaves us wondering what exactly might have been the best tactics for Black Americans and Mexican-Americans.

On one hand, individuals like Baldwin could be criticized for proliferating the race war, perpetuating the divide for non-white communities, and allowing white supremacy to rule. After all, it's possible to assume that if all non-white communities joined in solidarity, there could

have been a lot more political and cultural impact for all of them. Their struggles were all similar enough, the ways in which whites perceived them left them all at the bottom of a hierarchy of power. But on the other hand, Baldwin could be praised for being so defiantly Black. To deny that non-white communities faced oppression would be ignorant, but to reject the fact that Black Americans' history in America was unique and rooted in complex cultivation that traced back centuries would be just as naive. The expectation that Black civil rights leaders could and should carry the burden of liberation for all non-white groups repositions them at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. By forcing African-Americans to produce the other non-white groups' labor, the non-white groups maintain social power over Black people while being marginalized by white supremacy.

This raises an important discussion about solidarity from several perspectives. The reason Black people weren't obligated to coalesce was because the communities asking for cooperation all have anti-black histories. Some Mexican-American groups seeking solidarity did so in a way that did not call for Mexican-Americans to confront their own bias against Black people. (Ramos, 19). At the same time, Mexican-Americans contributing to Black civil rights efforts didn't necessarily guarantee or prove much work on behalf of Mexican-Americans to help Black movements. After all, Mexican-American activists argued that discrimination was predicated because of language barriers and Mexican-American students' inability to speak English, an issue that Black Americans did not have to tackle for themselves. (Ramos, 46). Civil Rights Leader, Martin Luther King Jr.'s popular quotation states, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Yet it leaves us wondering, if injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, but the fight for justice is inherently unjust, what options do we have?

At the risk of generalizing the Mexican Civil Rights movement and erasing those who

existed in both the Mexican and Black efforts because of dual identity or mere advocacy work, it's crucial to note how Sanchez readjusted his priorities to promote racial solidarity in a more active and action-driven way. He reached out to Clifford Forster, director of ACLU, to make his case, arguing that while a victory in the case of Sweatt v. Painter would benefit Black law students at UT, there would be no drastic, fundamental change in discriminatory laws. He advised them to use the Mendez case which could completely abolish segregation laws everywhere (Behnken, 51).

These sentiments and ideas carried over into the next decade, helping obtain another victory in Brown V. Board of Education, which ended systematic segregation against all non-white groups, but in doing so, the Mexican-American Civil Rights movement welcomed African-Americans into their very familiar obstacles similar discrimination. No laws permitted segregation and educational discrimination, but the privatization of the education system, along with zoning, funding, and other subtle tactics allowed social and cultural white supremacy to translate back into political discrimination and marginalization. So Mexican-Americans and Black Americans returned to square one: having to convince their white counterparts of their humanity all while being perceived as inferior in a society that was legally supposed to protect them. Just like that, the nuances and complexities of both civil rights movements became insignificant in the eyes of white power structures whose mission was to uphold racial superiority and deny non-whites the opportunity of liberation (Behnken, 77).

Race relations between Black and Mexican-American activists continued to evolve over time, and their identities as well as their journeys towards civil rights highlighted their explicit differences. In the years following Brown v. Board of Education, there were war of cultures and identity rather than of discrimination. For example, Manuel Avila of the G.I. Forum, one of the

most important Mexican Civil Rights organizations of the time, expressed his disdain for the idea of joining forces with African-American civil rights groups out of fear that whites would call them "n*gger-lovers," and that fighting alongside black people would be "suicide" (Behnken, 98). Anti-blackness in these organizations, ones that were supposed to be progressive and boasted values of equity and liberation, was alive and prominent. These views weren't unique either, with other organizations such as LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) adopting and spreading the same message. In response, Black civil rights groups denounced the idea of merging civil rights struggles. But there was a critical difference. Whereas African-American groups distanced themselves from Mexican American groups out of retaliation to anti-Black sentiments, Mexican-Americans distanced themselves from Black groups out of pure anti-Black racism. The logic of Mexican-Americans was simple: only one non-white group can survive and gain the acceptance and tolerance of the whites and if that was the case, it was going to be them. (Araiza, 103).

Legal definitions and institutionalized differences revealed that though the plights of Black and Latino groups were similar, there were insurmountable differences, at least according to leaders of each group at the time. In addition to the legal technicalities that kept these groups in a blurred space between unity and division, geography was a crucial factor in perpetuating sentiments from one group about the other. Segregation directly and indirectly separated the two groups across towns and cities across the state of Texas. Jim Crow laws popularized signs like "colored only" and "whites only" on public facilities, while signs like "No Mexicans Allowed," or "No Chilli, Mexicans Keep Out" promoted a cultural segregation that perpetuated divisions across racial lines. In his essay, The Movement in the Mirror: Civil Rights and the Causes of Black-Brown Disunity in Texas, Brian D. Behnken, captures these discriminatory practices. He

writes:

"In addition to these statewide aspects of segregation, many local communities also implemented laws to shore up the Jim Crow system. For instance, ordinances in Houston segregated streetcars in 1903. Other local statutes kept the races separated at city hospitals, libraries, and swimming pools. In Dallas and San Antonio, local custom guaranteed that blacks and Mexican-Americans could only live in certain portions of these cities, attend segregated schools, and have access to low wage jobs. Austin's city government prevented Mexican-Americans and African-Americans from utilizing the city's main library and the downtown hospital. Since much of the Jim Crow system was based on local custom, African-Americans and Mexican-Americans ultimately ultimately suffered both de jure and de facto norms and of segregation."

In Texas, the third highest ranking state for lynchings (especially towards Black Americans and surprisingly, towards Mexican-Americans as well), scholars believe segregation was key in proliferating the race war. Rather than categorizing areas of towns as "white" and then "other," each specific demographic had their "own side of town" (Behnken, 77). Local governments even went as far as to designate schools for each race. For example, the metropolitan city of San Antonio was separated into three areas: the west side had neighborhoods with predominantly Mexican-American demographics, the east side was predominantly Black, and the rest had white segregated neighborhoods. San Antonio Independent School District assigned schools to each neighborhood, and in the midst of protesting segregated schools, each of the racial groups developed the habit of defending itself and pushing for an agenda that benefited their own group

respectively. Segregation was subtle but its lasting impacts created a racial tension that was almost impossible to reconcile because Black and Mexican-American groups didn't have physical access to one another. White segregation from other races occurred because White supremacist ideologies led whites to believe that they were superior to other races, and therefore they deserved better quality education as well as the right to be separate from non-whites. The separation of Black and Mexican-American communities, however, could very well have been intentionally strategic. (Behnken, 75). History shows us that at a surface-level, Black communities and Latinx communities have endured similar experiences in oppression and opposition from white structures in power and white individuals in general. By categorizing both groups as "other," white power structures could have granted the two separate groups some form of subliminal unity. In their otherness, there was every possibility for the two marginalized groups to team up, recognize the injustice in their oppression, and form a coalition that could more directly and effectively tackle the white supremacy disempowering them. So by segregating them from each other, making sure they never have the physical means to interact on a large enough scale, all of those opportunities are evaded and instead replaced with racial tension. Rather than racial cooperation, Black and Mexican-American groups were forced to participate in a game of survival of the fittest. As a result, competing for their own personal gains, they begin to perceive each other as enemies.

Within cities, segregation kept different racial groups in opposition to each other, but on a larger scale, racial groups were often divided among the entire regions of Texas. East Texas, otherwise known as the Black Belt of the state, was home to a predominantly African-American demographic. Other Black Texans lived predominantly in big cities like Houston and Dallas. Mexican-American (and often, Mexican) people lived in high concentrations in the South and

Southwest in cities like San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and towns across the Rio Grande Valley. Because of political history, Mexican populations were already established in the South and along the border, so integration and migration allowed these heavily populated areas to persist. Because of these geographic divisions, Black civil rights events and Mexican-American civil rights events did not seem to intersect frequently. For example, in 1960, African-Americans orchestrated a sit-in in Marshall, Texas, an East Texas town that was home to mainly Black Americans, with less than one percent of the population being of Mexican descent. African-American civil rights leaders saw no need to call in Mexican-Americans to help them with their efforts (Araiza, 101).

In instances when Black groups did reach out for Mexican-American help, the turnout was discouraging. In a similar protest in Huntsville, another East Texas town, civil rights leaders reached out to Mexican-Americans for support but saw little response. Only one man, Gilbert Campos of Houston, showed up. The police officers urged him to leave because he had no business being there on behalf of Black individuals. When he refused, he was arrested. Even when Black civil rights groups called for help, in this instance and others, they received almost none, and the little that they did receive was criminalized, further discouraging potential Mexican-American supporters in the future. Meanwhile, Mexican-Americans did little to actively support from African-American communities. Mexican-Americans in South Texas began organizing voting drives to remove the all-white members of the Crystal City government. In 1963, they proved to be successful with the induction of an all Mexican-American city council in the local government. However, all five members were outvoted in the next election cycle because of their inability to garner African-American support. Granted, only two percent of the city was a Black population, but that two percent was enough to defeat Mexican-American

politicians, not only actively voting against the Mexican-Americans but joining in efforts to make sure they were not re-elected. Black residents of the time believed their issues weren't being reflected accurately or taken seriously in the political realm, so they were so antagonistic towards the Mexican-Americans that they voted for the white political candidates.

As previously mentioned, geographic divisions almost certainly kept the groups apart After all, groups would have to travel over 600 miles to get to a city with a large demographic of the other racial group. Physically, coalition seemed ineffective and inefficient and it made much more sense to focus on independent needs in independent regions. However, it's more complicated to understand why one racial group failed to participate in efforts and offer support when the other was attempting to organize. Perhaps the easiest explanation is that the dichotomy between Black and Mexican-American minority and majority status kept the two groups from feeling compelled to get involved in the other's work. Where Black people were the majority, Mexican-American involvement seemed insignificant because Mexican-Americans did not see themselves reflected in Black issues and when they could empathize, they were discouraged from potential punishment from whites in authority. Where Mexican-Americans were the majority, Black residents found themselves neglected by both Mexican-American and white politicians in power.

This is where things get especially confusing. Obviously white institutions had much more political power to further the oppression of Black residents in comparison to Mexican-Americans, at least legally speaking, yet in the example provided above, Black residents would have much rather offered their support for white people who explicitly and overtly oppressed them for centuries. (Ramos, 44). Perhaps racial bias and prejudice against Mexican-Americans was a common value for African-Americans. Could this anti-Mexican sentiment be a simple

disdain for Mexican people, their language, cultural, and behaviors? Could be a lack of common purpose? Or is it a result of centuries of anti-blackness perpetuated by Mexican-American communities? Regardless, it is interesting to note that Black individuals would seemingly rather accept racism at the hands of white individuals than from other non-white counterparts. Perhaps that makes sense. At least with white supremacist power structures, Black American know what they're getting themselves into since the racism is explicit and hypervisible. With communities of color, it's seemingly more complicated. In some cases, other non-Black communities of color could very well be allies. But when potential allies, can also be potential oppressors, is it worth the risk?

The War on Poverty

From exposing and challenging white supremacy to interracial conflict between marginalized groups, the color of one's skin determined a person's advantages and disadvantages in an unstable America in the Civil Rights era, especially in Texas where demographics were split between Whites, Black folk, and Mexican-Americans pretty evenly depending on the exact location. While race remained the epicenter for conversations surrounding equality and change, the ways in which race and class intersected as social structures were crucial to the relationships among different groups as well. While whites generally lived above the poverty line, and Black and Brown communities generally lived below the poverty line, there were instances where these generalizations were broken.

It was common, for instance, that white people were below the poverty line, but less likely for Black and Brown people to rise above it. But these statistics shaped the ways in which the white community demonized communities of color, accusing them of taking up jobs and

resources. For lower-class white America, people of color were an easy target for their rage and frustration with the state of the economy. Not only was tension fueled between whites and communities of color, internal tension between communities of color increased as they were forced to fight over resources - government aid, housing, political power - as a means of survival. After the War on Poverty was institutionalized through Lyndon B. Johnson's policy and rhetoric, class divisions began to fuel racial divisions across the state, perpetuating anti-blackness across a variety of communities, especially Mexican-Americans.

On January 18th, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson announced his economic plan to combat the increasing poverty rates that had reached nineteen percent nationwide, thus the War on Poverty was born. As a result, the Economic Opportunity Act was passed and the subsequent agency, Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), was born. Under this legislation and this agency's supervision, several community-based agencies were created to combat poverty, increase access to healthcare, expand educational opportunities, and strengthen the safety nets of impoverished citizens.

More specifically, the OEO was responsible for offering new opportunities such as: Job Corps, and education and training program to help transition younger generations into the workforce. Several other local agencies had the same mission but tailored their work to low-income citizens. Work-study programs were implemented to help low-income students pay for their higher-level education. Urban and Rural Community Action provided technical and fiscal funding to nonprofit and private organizations aiding impoverished areas. (Clayson, 125). Adult Basic Education offered adults whose lack of education hindered their workforce capabilities the capacity to rejoin the educational world and level up. Loans to rural families in poverty were offered to help increase annual incomes. Assistance for Migrant Agricultural employees helped

migratory workers and families with essentials. These programs, among many others, were largely offered to and sought after by African-Americans and Mexican-American groups across the state of Texas.

The OEO's efforts were targeted to address class inequality, but in the state of Texas, race became just as important. Bill Crook, the head of the Southwest Regional Office in Austin, piloted Affirmative Action-like work before the policy was even introduced. He made it a priority to hire a Mexican-American (Tom Robles) and an African-American (Herbert Tyson) as regional manager of the Community Action Program and deputy director respectively. The three of them together managed a staff of about twenty-five percent people of color, with nearly half being Black and Mexican-American respectively while a small portion remained distributed among American Indians and an Asian-American. But while the southwest region of OEO was trying to be inclusive and racially conscious in their war against poverty, the conflict that stemmed from the actual war on poverty itself began to rise.

Whites below and above the poverty line often criticized the War on Poverty, calling it the liberal's means of disguising a civil rights agenda as economic policy. (Clayson, 147). Competition for both control of and resources from the OEO left Black and Mexican-American communities at constant conflict. Several prominent factors highlighted this conflict: conflict of values, leadership, and population shifts.

First and foremost, many politicians at the time insisted that the War on Poverty was a scheme to promote civil rights ideals despite the OEO's efforts to approach the so-called war as "color-blind," even fabricating inaccurate statistics about who lived in poverty and who didn't in regards to racial groups. Nevertheless, Johnson's name and image were tied too closely to the Civil Rights movement to convince the general public otherwise. This battle of whether or not

The War on Poverty was a civil rights issue enraged Mexican-American civil rights leaders at the time because they felt either option left them neglected, despite their socioeconomic class (Clayson, 125). If the war really was just color-blind, then the specific needs of the Mexican-American community were being ignored. For example, in Corpus Christi, where a large percentage of the impoverished people were Mexican American, whites predominantly managed community action groups of the OEO. When Mexican Americans voiced their concerns to OEO administrators, they agreed that there should be more Mexican-American represented, but the needs of the larger community needed qualified leaders, not just leaders based on race. So they were shut out. At the same time, Mexican-American activists felt that when the OEO did take a stance on racial issues, they favored African-Americans and tailored all their efforts and attention towards that group instead of their own. For example, when Johnson held a conference aimed at working towards equality, he failed to invite Mexican-American civil rights groups, but invited many African-American ones, leading Chicano employees to protest OEO offices across the state. But that perception -- one that demonized another minority group, in this case Black Americans, instead of the dominant one, in this case White Americans -- wasn't something only Mexican-Americans did.

Post Civil Rights Era into the New Millennium

The racial tensions of the Civil Rights era have had lasting impacts on race relations during the end of the century and into the new millennium. Since then, many social and political events occurred that affected both groups independently and as a non-white coalition. In 1971, President Nixon declared a War on Drugs, a political effort that destabilized Latin American countries and caused increased immigration of Latinx folk into the United States. It also

stigmatized the Latinx community, especially in Texas right on the border where Mexican-Americans were often generalized as drug users, dealers, and criminals. At the same time, it was an easy excuse to further criminalize Black people for nonviolent, drug-related offenses. In the 1980's, HIV AIDS emerged as a global epidemic that disproportionately affected people of color, with Latinx being one of the most vulnerable, and Black folks being the most vulnerable. In the 1990's into the new millennium, the emergence of technology widened the educational gap between Whites and Black/Brown communities. In the 2000's, the race war rages on. In his essay, "A New Day in Babylon," Matthew Whitaker explores the ways in which African-American and Mexican-American groups have crafted the other, conflicted over differences, and collaborated to obtain power.

2008 was a pivotal year in American history with the election of the country's first and only Black president. But while President Obama had little to no trouble recruiting Black voters, Chicano voters were hesitant, and in some cases, completely opposed to voting for a Black man as president. (Whittaker, 258). During the primaries, Texas was one of few states that Democratic voters split between Obama and Clinton. Not only was Obama forced to confront his own racial identity as a talking point on the campaign trail, but as he approached states with large Mexican-American demographics, it became a necessity to address the history of conflict between Black and Latinx groups across the country. In his essay, Whitaker quotes two Latinx discussing their experience with voting in the 2008 election. One woman, Natasha Carrillo, acknowledged that,

"Many Latinos are not ready for a [black] person of color. I don't think many Latinos will vote for Obama. There's always been a tension in the Black and Latino communities."

It's crucial to understand Latinx role in America's voting landscape. As the "sleeping giant," of American politics, Latinx have, recently more than ever, become a huge opportunity for decision making as far as elections are concerned. While candidates like Obama may not have primarily depended on Latinx voters to obtain the seat in the oval office, a Latinx voter turnout could make huge differences in who is and isn't elected across the country. It's also important to note that Mexican-Americans make up about two thirds of the US Latinx population and Texas has one of the largest Latinx populations as well as one of the fastest-growing Latinx populations. So Obama's relationship with this demographic - honestly, all Black politicians relationship with this demographic, could make or break the political makeup of our country. This is important to consider as demographics change. If one of our fastest growing demographics in the country is riddled with anti-Black racism, what does it mean for the future of Black people in America?

Obama's campaign, one riddled with promise for change and the recognition for marginalized, non-white groups reignited a racial tension among Black and Brown progressives. Many Black Obama supporters were adamant that Black power movements had set the precedent for Chicano movements to emerge and prosper in a racially tense era of the country. Nevertheless, on November 4th, 2008, Barack Obama was elected president, obtaining 67 percent of the Latinx vote nationwide. But as Obama served as the poster child for a post-racial America, racial minorities, especially African-Americans and Mexican-Americans and especially in Texas, were forced to confront their histories in the US, both as separate entities and as one. The perceived reputations that one group had of the other became more prominent as both groups gained minimal but visible strides in the political realm and in mainstream America overall.

Geography again played a crucial role in the cultivation of Mexican-Americans' perceptions of Black people. In cities like El Paso, Laredo, and town within the Rio Grande Valley, Mexican-Americans remained the dominant demographic. In some high schools in these cities, the student population would be greater than 99 percent Mexican-American, meaning the exposure to Black people was minimal if even existent at all. One might think anti-black racism would be absent from these communities because the absence of Black people meant there was no one to act racist towards, but on the contrary, this absence was dangerous because it has only allowed residents of border towns to understand Black people insofar as the media portrays them. Stereotypes, movies, news stories - these are all some of the only access Mexican-Americans have to Black people. Considering Black people have a toxic relationship with media -- news outlets painting them as criminals, Hollywood painting them as gangsters, etc. -- this single narrative was and continues to be the only access a lot of Mexican-Americans have with African-Americans. This exposure coupled with historical remnants of anti-Black racism from Mexico is all many of these communities have to understand Black people. Additionally, policies like the 100-mile zone, the implementation of Immigration Customs Enforcement, and stricter deportation procedures forced undocumented immigrants and their families to remain in border towns. (Checkpoints are set up along the 100 mile radius of the borders of Texas where Border Patrol agents check for citizenship). Because of this, cultural norms and ideologies of Mexican-Americans persisted unchanged and unchallenged. In these regions, there is not much diversity outside of Mexican culture, so it's no surprise these same ideals continued (and continue) from generation to generation in these towns.

While border towns have an easier time upholding Mexican-American culture,urban cities also contained Mexican-Americans perpetuating anti-black racism, though the circumstances were drastically different. As immigration specifically from Mexican-Americans increased in the 2000's, metropolitan cities like San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas, saw an increase of Mexican-American residents. In some cases, neighborhoods that were predominantly Black in these cities saw influxes of Mexican/Mexican-American families. In these areas, job competition became a primary reason for conflict. After the economic recession and the subsequent instability and high unemployment rates, jobs seemingly became an unattainable commodity for Black and Mexican-American workers. This led to African-Americans often adopting xenophobic outlooks, seeing Mexican(Americans) as competition who were taking employment opportunities away from them (Clayson, 1467). Mexican-Americans, however, often still saw Black people as criminals and nothing else. These competitive ideologies continued in multiple facets of race relations. Mexican-American and African-American gangs became increasingly violent towards each other in urban cities (most notable in large cities like Los Angeles, but also on a smaller-scale in cities across Texas) (Behnken, 203).

Welfare programs also increased competition among the two racial minorities. Food stamps, Medicaid, financial aid, unemployment benefits, and more all became relatively scarce resources after the recession, so the two groups, both disproportionately living under the poverty line, were forced to fight over these resources as a means of survival. (Whitaker, 257). Though this type of dispute was more institutional than physical, the groups both recognized that if they weren't receiving benefits, it's because the other group was taking them. You would think class struggles would be an effective factor in building solidarity between the two groups, as Whitaker argues, but the circumstances have made it almost impossible. In reality, African-Americans and

Mexican Americans need jobs, money, food, places to live, education for their children. Solidarity sounds great but when the harsh reality of whiteness means you have to fight each other for survival, for food on the table and roof over your head, at least so it seems, it becomes so much more unattainable.

When the introduction of islamophobia as the result of 9/11 and the resulting war add more fuel to the fire that is the race war, the mentality of "every man for himself" increasingly spreads with regards to each race group. Obama's victory was a symbol for the opportunity for racial groups in America to join forces and fight against the true enemy, but as survival became more and more difficult, the chances of achieving such decreased before our very eyes.

Anti-blackness from Mexican-Americans in the new millennium has been more subtle than anti-Blackness in Mexican history: scapegoating, complicity allowing cultural perpetuations of anti-blackness with echoes of the "n-word" from non-black Mexican-Americans and rules about not dating or marrying Black people. But in a post 9/11 America, where whiteness remains and reintroduces itself as the dominant power, complicity is undoubtedly just as dangerous. After all, if we are witnessing an oppressor oppress their victim and we do nothing about it, are not also partially responsible for the victim's suffering?

The ways in which Black and Brown identities continued to interact, intertwine, and overlapped have changed medium, method, and reason over the years, but the relationships between these two communities -- in Texas -- persist. In a postmodern world where many argued racism no longer exists, the relationship between African-Americans and Mexican-Americans highlights that this is no such case. After George Zimmerman's acquittal for the unjust murder of Trayvon Martin, three Black queer women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi founded #BlackLivesMatter, an internet hashtag turned social movement aimed at bringing

awareness towards the injustices of African-Americans in America and the need for Black liberation from oppressive structures. Three words with a simple message and yet the amount of backlash and controversy received by this movement has been insurmountable. Some critics have claimed that the movement is racist because it solely focuses on black lives, arguing that we should instead focus on how #AllLivesMatter. (Clearly, they were missing the point). Others have used it to antagonize the Black community, arguing that in fact #BlueLivesMatter, while Black Lives are actually the true villains. (Statistics could easily prove otherwise). Mexican-Americans have undoubtedly had their share of confusion with the movement, from dismissing it to appropriating it to remaining completely unaware about its existence. #BlackLivesMatter has undoubtedly been one of the most recent instances in which anti-blackness from Mexican-American communities is revealed in both explicit and implicit ways.

The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, and many more motivated African-Americans across the country to organize and spread their message through social media when mainstream media failed to paint accurate pictures of what was occurring. So while these names, these stories, and this movement gained national traction, many wondered why others went completely unnoticed. Omar Abrego, Ernesto Javier Canepa Díaz, and Rubén Garcia Villalpando were just a few of may Latinos who were also unjustly murdered by police officers? But news outlets remained silent. (Sol). Enraged, several Mexican-Americans cried out, adopting the familiar words of African-Americans, and thus hashtags like #BrownLivesMatter and #LatinoLivesMatter were born. You probably haven't heard of these as much because they never really gained as much popularity. Mexican-American opponents and proponents for these unpopular hashtags developed their own sentiments as to what this type of reaction, or lack thereof, meant to them.

Proponents of #BrownLivesMatter argued that this was an injustice -- not just the killings of Latino bodies nationwide, but the prioritization of Black deaths over brown deaths in the media. (Florido). Many have shed light on the chilling statistics: the disproportionate killings of Latinos by police, the number of police officers held accountable, the risk of being killed by law enforcement (Downs) - but instead of simply raising awareness, these efforts have primarily been appropriations of a movement that already existed and ultimately another way for Latino communities to have to compete with Black communities. After #BlackLivesMatter emerged, a slew of Latino activists and writers published articles and think pieces arguing why Black lives seemed to matter more than Latino lives. (Florido). Some of the reasons as to why Latino lives have been disregarded are valid: the erasure of Mexican lynchings and other historical discrimination (Carrigan and Webb, 411), the stigma of the Latinx body as foreign, and the language barriers that keep these issues from entering the mainstream media are just a few. The anti-blackness comes in the form that the two movements are set up in contrast to each other: why is one more important than the other instead of why aren't both being addressed and fixed?

If you search either of the hashtags #BrownLivesMatter or #LatinoLivesMatter on Twitter or other social media platforms, you'll find hundreds of thousands of messages from Latinx folk claiming #BlackLivesMatter fails to include them in their struggle towards equality. This sentiment is all too reminiscent of similar sentiments in the Civil Rights era when Mexican-American activists were enraged at Black activists for focusing solely on themselves. In her article, #LaGenteUnida, Latina activist Amanda Agustin offers a different perspective, stating:

"...rather than being resentful towards #BlackLivesMatter for not including Latinx, let's focus on the system itself. When outrage is directed towards fellow oppressed people instead of the

oppressors we take a dangerous step away from justice. If we want to shed light to the injustices against our community we have to be willing to do the work too. Let's organize, protest, and use our own voices — and hashtags — to speak out."

But these words aren't just the result of Amanda's reflection and self-awareness. In fact, they're the product of countless Black people who have time and time again reiterated that it is not nor was it ever their job to be responsible for other communities, especially when those communities have historically and continue to perpetuate anti-black racism. For example, at the 2016 Oscar Awards, Black actor, Chris Rock, criticized the Academy on live national television for the lack of Black representation in film. Soon after, Latinxs (among other minorities) complained about not being included in Rock's statement. On twitter, HuffPo Latino (a Latinx section of the Huffington Post) tweeted out:

""We want Black actors to get the same opportunity..." @chrisrock But what ABOUT the Latinos? We want that too! #Oscars #OscarsSoWhite"

This type of sentiment sparked outrage from the Black community, as many argued that this was another instance in which other minority groups wanted to benefit off of Black labor while doing none of the work. (Syed). And so the #NotYourMule hashtag trended nationwide on twitter -- a space where Black Americans could express their frustration with other non-black people of color. The responses only affirmed the reasons the hashtag emerged to begin with, such as as the following tweet:

"#NotYourMule wow ok so instead of being progressive y'all are being racist towards latinos? yall are a bunch of fucking hypocrites"

"#NotYourMule my problem is that the black movement expects everyone to support them but they really can't support other PoC?"

"When we organize never for one set or another, the power is numbers. #NotYourMule is simply not my values. Each one teach one #solidarity" (Ramirez).

These conflicts might seem petty especially in comparison to Mexican-Americans who owned Black slaves in the past two centuries, but regardless of the severity, the implications are still the same. Some Black people may highlight the historical Mexican ownership of Black slaves, and some may know nothing of its existence. Nevertheless, this is erasure of Blackness from things Black people have created. It's the profiting off of Black labor. It's the co-opting of Black efforts, and it's done all at the hands of Latinx people. Because as history shows us, from land and power in Mexico during Spanish colonization to attention from the government in the Civil Rights era to fighting for economic resources in the 21st century, it's always been a competition.

As social media has become embedded into our very existence, as communication has become globalized, and as voices that were once silenced are increasingly amplified, the perceptions of African-American communities from Mexican-Americans are becoming a lot more complex and nuanced, in some spaces even progressive. In July of 2016, Eighteen-year-old Aimaloghi Eromosele organized a #BlackLivesMatter rally in the Rio Grande Valley, a metropolitan region on the border of Mexico in South Texas with an over 90% Latinx population

and a less than 1% Black population. Many local residents joined to declare the need for Black and Brown unity. A residential college professor told a local news reporter,

"The Mexican-American community also faced violence by the law enforcement especially in Texas by the Texas Rangers, so there is documentation of police brutality and law enforcement brutality against Mexican-Americans, not only in Texas, but Arizona, California" (Carrigan and Webb, 413).

By outlining the similarities in their histories, she is able to understand the crucial need for solidarity. Unfortunately, her cooperation is often accompanied by others' antagonism. A group of over a hundred bikers simultaneously formed an anti-BlackLivesMatter protest across the street, arguing that this protest created racial divisions where they were not needed. Protester Efren Barajas told a local news reporter:

"Down here in the Valley, it is not us against them, no. We all work together."

Barajas, like many others especially in border towns like the valley, insist that a colorblind approach is more effective especially because the Black population in the valley is so small and the discrimination they encounter isn't as aggressive as it is in places like Ferguson. But that is the embodiment of new-wave anti-blackness in Mexican-American communities in Texas. Anti-blackness from Mexican-American communities is often so subtle and for many reasons. The lack of exposure to Black Americans in border towns heavily dominated by Latinx residents leave Mexican-Americans believing that racism doesn't exist the way it used to because their

exposure to Black people is drastically limited. In other instances, it's a constant comparison that cultivates competition between the two groups. In a state where Texas Rangers killed hundreds of Mexican-Americans can also villainize #BlackLivesMatter for the killing of four police officers in Dallas in 2016, it's no surprise how much media attention, as well as the complete lack of such media attention, continues to influence the attitudes of Mexican-Americans from border to border.

What Does This Mean for Identity?

History shows us African-American and Latinx communities have long standing conflict. Just look at Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Brazil -- all countries where anti-blackness is political and institutionalized. (Pena, Sidanius, and Sawyer, 749). But in a country that prides itself on its "melting pot" reputation, it's particularly important to unpack what one marginalized group's oppressive perceptions of another marginalized group does for the cultivation of identity. We've uncovered the centuries worth of history of anti-blackness in Mexican-American communities in Texas from its origins in pre-colonial Mexico to the emergence of Black liberation movements in the 21st century. But throughout all of this paper, I've unpacked an inherent, subsequent dichotomy: Brown vs. Black, Mexican-American vs. African-American, one vs the other. What happens to those who exist between the margins? Afro-Latinidad identity has been erased from Mexican history since the African diaspora spread to Mexico. Though Mexican-American identity is quite literally the epitome of multiculturalism and multiracial identity comprised of American identity with mestizaje roots that include Spanish, Indigenous, and African ancestry, it's crucial to note how Afro-Latino identity is seldom acknowledged in the US, especially Afro-Mexican identity in Texas (Avila, 13).

In his article, Redefining Race in America, Phillip Kretsedemas argues the emergence of this reclamation of identity could disrupt the dichotomous nature of race conversations in America. He asserts that race is more often than not seen as a binary: you're either black or you're white. If you're anything other than those, your identity is understood in terms of which identity you lean more towards. Think about it: Asian-Americans are crafted as the model minority because of their proximity to whiteness (social mobility, respectability politics, etc.) Latinx identity, even other Brown identities (Arab, South Asian, Indigenous) have all been seen as foreign identities, not fully understood or entrenched in American history. Afro-Latino identity not only exposes the American nature of the racial binary, but challenges what it means to be a multiracial society. If as a society we can barely grasp the idea of what it means to be a non-white identity, what does that say about our understanding of people who have multiple identities? Whereas the idea of the melting pot usually meant we coexisted as different cultural identities, what does it mean when people themselves become melting pots? Questions of identity inevitably change. Who gets to decide whose identity? Does Afro-Latinx mean someone who comes from historical roots of African heritage in a Latinx-appearing body? Or can it also encompass a biracial individual who has one Black Parent and one Mexican(American) parent? Even then, in a culture where anti-blackness is so ingrained, where Afro-Mexicans don't have access to the vocabulary, history, or understanding of their identity, where internalized hatred is undoubtedly common (Davila, 142), what happens when an Afro-Mexican denies their own identity? Do we impose it on them as a means of forcing them to reclaim their identity or does that not make us as imperialistic as our colonizers? For Mexican-American individuals who are not aware of their Blackness, where does that leave them? At a time when race has been politicized, Black bodies have been made targets by several institutions, and being Black has

been criminalized, how difficult is it for them to claim an identity that is under attack? And should they choose not to, is that not the epitome of privilege? What does this mean for Black individuals who may want to reclaim their Mexican roots, but do not have the native tongue, access to the culture, or "the look?" At what points does identity become quantifiable, and at what point do quantifiable measurements become the only way of validating people's identities? (Banks, 463).

As anti-Black racism is continuously perpetuated in Mexican-American communities, where do Afro-Mexican(Americans) fit into the greater picture? Are they the key to bridging the cultural gaps of two antagonistic groups? If so, is it fair? To saddle the ones with the most interlocking forms of oppressive identities with the burden of labor to educate and liberate both groups? Think about different regions in Texas with highly concentrated Black and Mexican demographics. The Rio Grande Valley has a predominantly Mexican population where subtle anti-Black sentiments can range from subtle to explicit, but still very much taught. Cities like Houston have histories of racial tension between these two groups with racial gangs in schools engaging in violence over territorial control (Vaca, 43). Areas like San Antonio and Austin have institutionalized segregation by another name where these demographics live separately from each other. Identifying as Afro-Mexican isn't only inaccessible, it can often be dangerous.

The Afro-Mexican forces us to redefine what it means to be Mexican, what it means to be Black, and what it means to be both. But in addition to those complexities, the Afro-Mexican identity complicates what it means to be white. Often when we think about whiteness, we associate it with Anglo/European heritage, but seldom do we look at whiteness as a global identity, or rather, an identity that exists in traditionally non-white demographics, such as Latinx groups, specifically, among certain Mexicans. In his book, Who is White? George Yancey goes

as far as to suggest that in the future, everyone but Black people will be white because of forced assimilation and the desire for power and liberation. Given that Afro-Mexicans have potential white identity in them, at least in Yancey's perspective, does this mean the erasure of Afro-Mexican identity indefinitely? Or do African-Americans have no choice but to dismiss all other identities besides Black because of societal impositions?

Because of its nature and historical configuration as a mixed-race identity, we forget that Mexican(American)s, too, can be white. Look at cities like Monterrey, Mexico, where countless Mexicans walk around with pale skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes -- obviously a direct result of Spanish (white) colonization. So where do those Mexicans stand with regards to their identity? When those Mexicans migrate to the United States, to Texas, do they inhabit the identity they choose or the identity they are perceived with having? When power of privilege plays a role in the way one's life shaped, what claims of oppression do White Mexicans have compared to Brown or even Black Mexican-Americans.

And then we have White Mexican-Americans who aren't directly from Monterrey or other Mexican cities, but who are born and raised in the United States. When we look at the political make-up today, we see individuals like Julian Castro, who because of his name and skin color cannot escape his cultural identity. On the other hand, you have individuals like Ted Cruz, who without his last name would probably never be singled out for having some sort of Latinx heritage.[4] When White Latinx can use their racial privilege to continue to oppress, marginalize, disenfranchise, stereotype, and generalize their Brown and Black counterparts, what does it mean to really be white? To actively participate in white supremacy? To uphold racist, colorist beliefs

[4] Ted Cruz is of Cuban descent, so this generalizes anti-Blackness in the greater Latinx identity, and though there are complex historical and political differences between Cuban-Americans and Mexican-Americans, the greater conversation of whiteness makes those differences negligible.

and institutions dismissing any cultural descent or heritage? When Brown and Black Mexican-Americans can't simply white-wash their skin the way others white-wash their names, it becomes clear that you don't have to be "white" to be white. Whiteness is a global identity. Whiteness is a global force of oppression. Whiteness is the reason anti-Black beliefs originated and persisted in Mexican culture. Whiteness is the reason Mexican-Americans adopted anti-Blackness in the cultivation of their own assimilated identity. When discussing African(American) and Mexican(American) conflict, there seems to be two actors when looking at it from a surface level, but as we dive into the history, growth, complexities, and nuances of the conflict, there is undoubtedly one causal factor at the core of every step: white supremacy. From this conclusion, we have to question whether anti-Blackness is the direct antithesis of white supremacy or just a product of white supremacy? If we imagine a world where white supremacy is defeated, or never existed to begin with, would other cultural groups like Mexicans or Mexican-Americans hold the same anti-Black sentiments? Because of the ways in which white supremacy works, whiteness is always seen as the standard, so we often equate Blackness as it's complete opposite. But what does that reveal about a society that only defines Blackness in its relation to whiteness? What does that mean for Afro-Mexicans who share the genes of both their oppressive ancestors and their oppressed ancestors?

Conclusion

During the international slave trade, Spanish colonialists brought in African slaves, forced them to compete with indigenous groups for resources, and forced them into the lowest class. During the twentieth century, White Americans perpetuated the idea that Black people were still of the lowest class, all while giving Mexicans the false notion that they were worth more when in reality they were simply being commodified for White American economic gain.

During the Civil Rights movement, White Americans kept Mexican-Americans and Black Americans separate to prevent any form of solidarity all while keeping them in competition with each other for resources and social mobility. All of that history continues to exist in new manifestations. As Mexican(Americans) struggle with proper identification of race and ethnicity, overcoming poverty, disproportionate health defects, stigma of mental illness, and a plethora of other social, political, cultural, and economic issues in comparison to their white counterparts (Delgado, 23), white supremacy has lured them away from racial solidarity and into empty promises of liberation, or at the very least a tiny bit of equality. So where does that leave Black Americans? Where does that leave Black Mexican-Americans? Where does that leave Black Mexican-Americans in Texas especially in big cities cities like Houston and Dallas where the two major groups co-exist? How do these dynamics play out in border towns like El Paso and Laredo where one of those groups is almost non-existent? In rural towns like Tyler and Lubbock where neither group are overly represented in the demographics? How do Black Mexican-Americans interact in a country that solely prioritizes a dichotomous view of race? What role do they take on in a world where whiteness is the supreme power and Blackness is seen as second-class? If history has shown us anything, it's that even when it comes to Afro-Mexican identity, history may repeat itself with the erasure of Afro-Mexicans and their continued marginalization. However, As these new identities emerge, as their voices slowly become amplified and their bodies gradually become more visible, as individuals reclaim identities that were once stripped away from them, perhaps the authors of the next chapter of history may rewrite a new ending. But for now, centuries of socializing understandings of race in our societies continue to silence their voices and erase their identities.

In order to fully understand the foundations of anti-Black racism in Mexican-American communities, revisiting the birth and journey of Blackness through this community was imperative. From the origins of Mexican Blackness during the international slave trade to the forced migration of both Black people and Mexicans to the US to the struggle for American acceptance to cohabiting in the same spaces in modern-day Texas, the cultivation of anti-black racism has been social, cultural, institutional, explicit, and sometimes subtly enacted. Comprehending this timeline is not only vital to shedding light on the power structures at play, as well as privilege and oppression among different American racial groups, but it is necessary to build a template for the ways in which we can work to dismantle this racial hierarchy and work towards liberating marginalized racial groups one by one and simultaneously.

Contemporary conversations surrounding oppression often centralize "people of color" as a framework to understand race relations, meaning the experiences and identities of non-white people in America are homogenized to include all marginalized non-white groups. Perhaps because after becoming socially conscious, understanding the ways in which white supremacy harmed us through colonization, imperialism, and enslavement, we are eager to distance ourselves from whiteness and the evils that are associated with it. Perhaps because solidarity seems promising, at least through the lense of white supremacy. But what happens when we view "people of color" from a Black/anti-Black framework? What happens when we understand how people of color operate when Blackness is centered? From the rallies to the t-shirts, non-Black #BlackLivesMatter advocates have advocated for liberation insofar as it is relative to whiteness. Analysis surrounding anti-Blackness in Mexican-American communities reveals the lack of understanding of anti-Blackness as an idea independent from white supremacy. Because of historical origins and evolution, our conception of Blackness has solely been defined by

whiteness and white supremacy, which can be an advantageous framework because it allows us identify the ways in which oppression and suffering have affected our individual and societal developments. But perhaps we would gain a better understanding of Blackness and anti-Blackness when those ideas serve as the central focus of our framework. We have yet to fully understand the ways in which Blackness could have developed in Mexico and Mexican-American communities free from slave ownership, competition, and the common bond of oppression, forcing us to wonder: how do "people of color," Mexicans, or Mexican-Americans respond to Blackness when Blackness is its own concept independent from white supremacy and defined by its own Black people?

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Biography

Julio Cesar Gonzalez Jr. was born in McAllen, Texas, a small town right on the border of Mexico. He is a graduate candidate from the University of Texas at Austin. From 2013 to 2017, Julio Gonzalez has specialized in interdisciplinary studies, receiving a Bachelor's of Science degree in Communication Studies with a focus in Political Communications, a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Plan II Honors, and has minored in Sociology. During his time at the University of Texas, Julio has participated and helped lead our campus' forensics team (Texas Speech), winning two team national championships in 2016 and 2017, as well as being named one of the top four individual speakers in After Dinner Speaking at the 2017 National Forensics Institutes, as well as multiple Top 6, Top 12, and Top 24 titles by the American Forensics Association and National Forensics Association over the past four years. Julio is also a state champion in Extemporaneous Speaking, Informative Speaking, and Impromptu speaking. In 2016, Julio was awarded early admissions into Teach for America, a national non-profit organization working to eliminate educational inequality for students of color and impoverished students across the country. Julio has committed to teaching early childhood bilingual education for the next two years beginning in the Fall of 2017. Julio plans to use this opportunity to enter law school and specialize in public interest law.